MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President. RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary. CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer.
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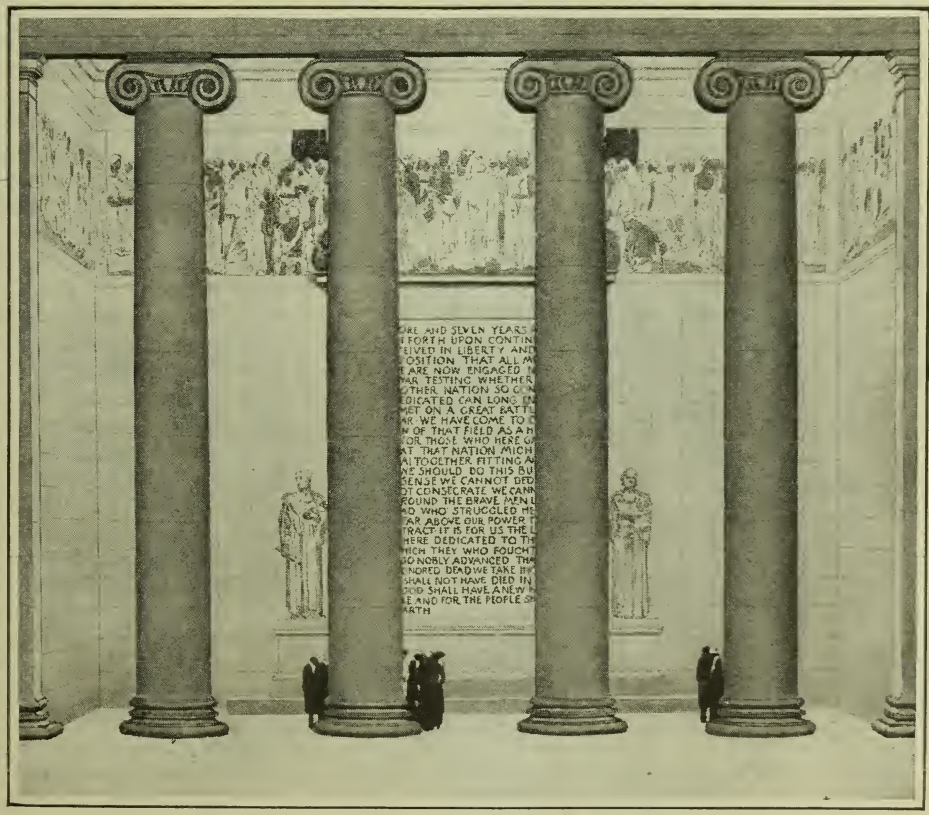
THE NATIONAL MONUMENT TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN

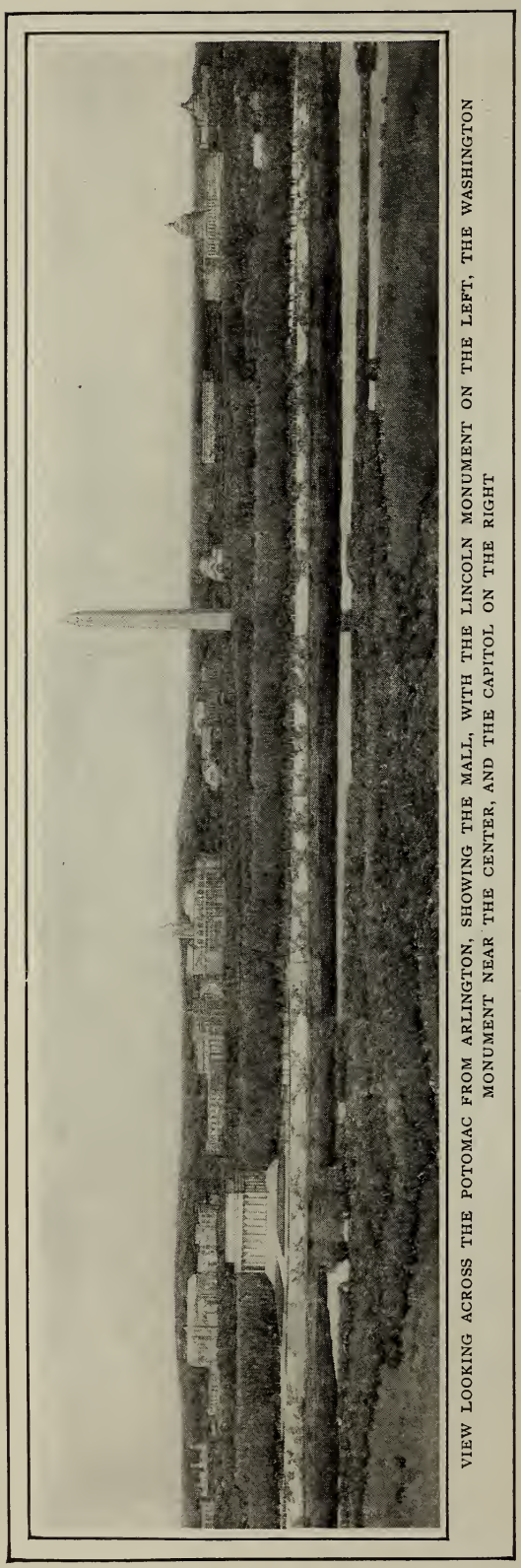
BY JUDSON C. WELLIVER

WHEN Congress, a few days before the end of the last session, passed the legislation providing for the erection of a memorial to Abraham Lincoln, it made, once and for all, the determination that our national capital is to be unique among cities, and of them all the most beautiful.

This is true, not because the particular memorial that is provided for is in itself of such transcendent importance in the artistic development of Washington's "city beautiful" scheme, but because the evolution of the general plan had reached a point where an important variation from it might have been a first step toward its ultimate abandonment. Moreover, there was a determined effort to commit Congress to an



ONE OF THE TWO SMALLER HALLS OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT, CONTAINING THE GETTYSBURG ORATION



VIEW LOOKING ACROSS THE POTOMAC FROM ARLINGTON, SHOWING THE MALL, WITH THE LINCOLN MONUMENT ON THE LEFT, THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT NEAR THE CENTER, AND THE CAPITOL ON THE RIGHT

entirely different memorial to the great emancipator. The success of that movement would have meant a diversion of energies and expenditures from a carefully organized project of city improvement, and it might have been generations before interest and attention could have been once more focused upon the original scheme.

It is curious to note how accident and design have worked together to bring us to the present assurance that Washington is destined to be a city of striking individuality and surpassing attractiveness. As everybody knows, the broad general plan of the city was made by Major L'Enfant, a French engineer selected for that task by General Washington. The scheme of diagonally radiating avenues, some of them centering at the Capitol and others at circular parks scattered about the city, was L'Enfant's idea. The circles, embowered in turf and shrubs and splendid trees, constitute a chief beauty of the national capital.

Tradition brings to us the story that L'Enfant, who had lived through the French Revolution, believed that every great capital was likely some day to be the seat of revolutionary uprisings, and that it should be so planned as to facilitate the movement of soldiers through its streets. Therefore the French artillerist, having in mind certain early experiences of Napoleon in quelling riots in Paris, devised his plan of circles and radiating avenues, in order to simplify the problem that some future Napoleon might confront in dealing with riot and revolution in Washington. Nothing could be simpler than to plant a park of artillery in each of these circles, and command every street and avenue approaching it. A few regiments of troops and plenty of grape and canister would insure the city's order.

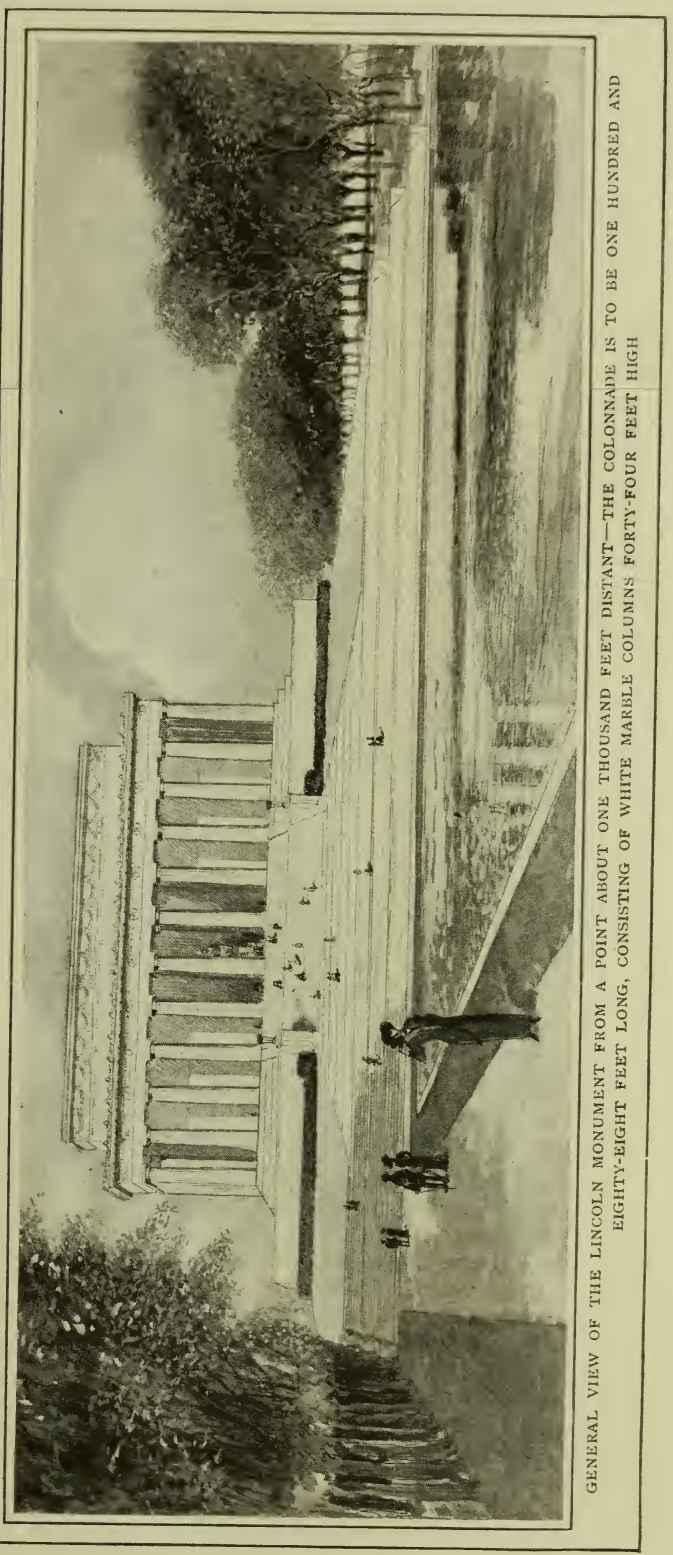
The military sharps assure us that L'Enfant was entirely right in dealing thus with what he conceived to be the prime problem in planning a great city. In truth, he builded vastly better than he thought, for while our capital has been happily spared the necessity of testing the military advantages of this plan, the scheme has peculiarly fitted itself to the national purpose of making

Washington a capital of peace and beauty. The circles have become, in the processes of the city's development, breathing-places, flower-gardens, and beauty-spots, rather than vantage-points of military power.

The Capitol, the most important and impressive building in the western world, was located where it is by L'Enfant. Here again we stumble upon another of those curious accidents which have so often interfered with the literal development of the founder's plan. L'Enfant faced his Capitol toward the east, looking out upon the fine plateau which is the summit of Capitol Hill. It was his purpose and Washington's expectation that the city should lie in that direction. So the west front of the Capitol, as first erected, was backed up rather ungracefully to the declivity of Capitol Hill, and was about as attractive as the rear view of a present-day storage-warehouse.

But the best-laid plans of mice and men and landscape engineers sometimes miscarry. A coterie of real-estate speculators, confident that some day there would be several thousand people in Washington, proceeded to corner the sightly property to the east of the Capitol, and to hold it for prices so high that the town was compelled to grow in precisely the opposite direction.

In the end, however, as with Major L'Enfant's spattering of circular military reservations, the event proved that destiny and the real-estate sharps had worked together to achieve an even better result than



GENERAL VIEW OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT FROM A POINT ABOUT ONE THOUSAND FEET DISTANT—THE COLONNADE IS TO BE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHT FEET LONG, CONSISTING OF WHITE MARBLE COLUMNS FORTY-FOUR FEET HIGH

architects and ordnance experts had had in mind. It became necessary to make a new front for the Capitol out of what had been intended to be its rear; and this accounts for the terraced approach from the west, which makes the structure so completely fulfil the ideal of an architectural "pile."

Washington's development has been marked by an interesting series of these accidents which enforced deviations from the original plans. The selection of the design and location of the Lincoln Memorial, however, presents one case of adherence to a scheme laid out long in advance; and it is certain to have a very important bearing upon the future beautification of the city.

Following generally the ideas of Washington and L'Enfant, the capital grew in rather a haphazard fashion during its early decades. There is a characteristic story that tells how Andrew Jackson located the Treasury Building where it is.

The Congressional and other authorities had squabbled interminably over the problem, until Jackson, disgusted with the whole performance, set out one morning to decide the thing himself. He picked his way among the gullies and tree-stumps of Pennsylvania Avenue until he found a place that satisfied his notion of a proper site. Perhaps having in mind the acrimonious debate over the relations of the Treasury to the "money power," he thought it would be well to have the nation's financial office where the White House could always keep a sharp eye on it. At any rate, Old Hickory is credited with placing the Treasury where it is to-day, and where it necessitated a huge and unsightly "jog" in the splendid sweep of Pennsylvania Avenue.

THE WORK OF THE PARK COMMISSION

These various accidents and interferences had so far distorted the general scheme from the original design that about a dozen years ago Congress was induced to create a Park Commission. This body was directed to study the whole problem of the city's plan and development, with the purpose of laying out a general and consistent project by which the location of parks, boulevards, avenues, public buildings, bridges, and the like should be guided in the future.

The head of this commission was the late Daniel H. Burnham, who laid out the splendid scheme of grounds and buildings for the Columbian Exposition at Chicago, and to whose genius is due a world's verdict that in its conception and execution was achieved the world's masterwork of landscape design and architectural adornment.

Volumes have been written about the noble project for an ideal capital which finally came from the work of the Burnham commission. In a sentence, it may be said that the commission rescued the original plans from the obsolescence in which unguided development was fast burying them, and fitted them to the possibilities of the present and the needs of the future.

The sweeping ground-plan of Washington that is now accepted as the general guide for future work represents the ideas of General Washington, of L'Enfant, and of Burnham, as modified by various accidents of municipal growth and Congressional legislation. Its basic feature is the Mall, a splendid public park lying between Pennsylvania Avenue on the north and the Potomac River on the south and extending from the Capitol at its eastern end to the Lincoln Memorial at its western. On the east and west axis of the Mall will stand the Grant Monument, at the foot of Capitol Hill; the Washington Monument, about a mile west of this, and practically midway of the park; and finally the Lincoln Memorial, another mile farther west, on the bank of the Potomac.

Thus from the west front of the Capitol one will get a vista of the nation's memorials to Grant, Washington, and Lincoln, planted in the generous expanse of the Mall's two miles of trees, turf, shrubs, and winding pathways. Beyond all this, the splendid Memorial Bridge just authorized by Congress will stretch away across the blue Potomac to beautiful Arlington Cemetery, linking the Mall and its memorials to the glorious green hills of Virginia and the last resting-place of the thousands of the nation's soldiers who there lie buried.

In the outworking of this plan, various splendid public buildings will be erected in or facing the Mall. This open space is to be connected at either end with a great encircling series of boulevards and parks that will sweep around and through the city. Rock Creek Park will be one link in this chain, and the beautiful grounds of the Soldier's Home another. Some of the sections have but recently been authorized by

Congress, and are not yet developed; others have still to look to future Congresses for authorizations and appropriations; but there is little doubt that within a comparatively few years the entire scheme will have been provided for.

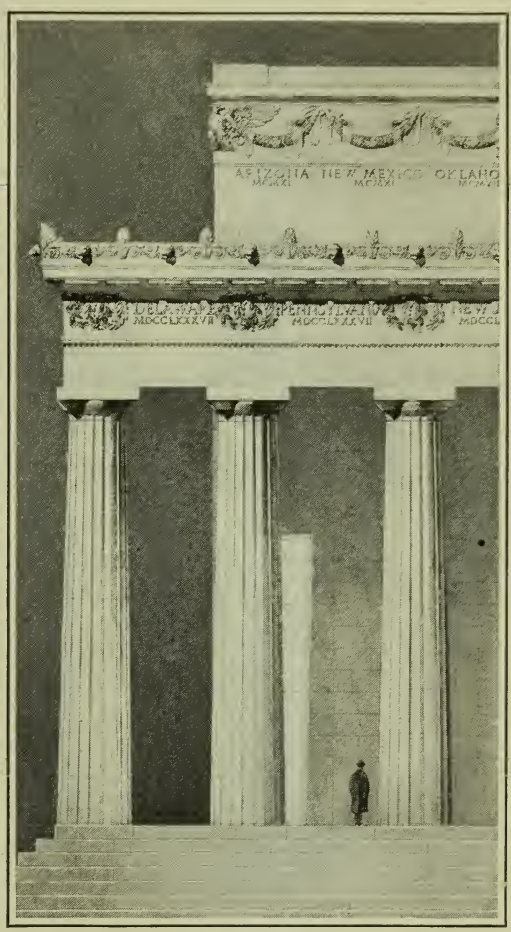
RIVAL MEMORIAL PROJECTS

The determination that the Lincoln Memorial should be erected on the Mall, and thus constitute one more substantial guarantee for the execution of this great plan, was not reached without a long and hard fight. Important and powerful local interests in Washington sought to have another location selected. There was also a nation-wide and strongly backed demand that the memorial to the martyred President should take the form of a highway from Washington to the battle-field of Gettysburg.

Plans were finally prepared for a splendidly simple and massive Greek temple to be erected on the Mall; and the question between the adoption of these plans and the construction of the Gettysburg Highway was presented to Congress last winter for determination. By an overwhelming vote, that body chose the temple, and rejected, at least for the time being, the highway.

The Gettysburg project will probably be revived, and in time it may be carried into effect; but it will be an independent improvement, a supplement to rather than a diversion from the noble conception that has been evolved from the dreams of L'Enfant into the plans of Burnham and the assured accomplishment of another generation.

The Lincoln Memorial will be in the form of a marble temple of the purest Greek architecture. Its designer is Henry Bacon, of New York. Perhaps no better suggestion of its character and impressiveness has been given than in the words of the late John Hay, who said:



DETAIL OF ONE CORNER OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT

"Lincoln, of all Americans next to Washington deserves the place of honor. He was of the immortals. You must not approach too close to the immortals. His monument should stand alone, remote from the common habitations of man, apart from the business and turmoil of the city—isolated, distinguished, and serene. Of all the sites this one near the Potomac is most suited to the purpose."

Mr. Bacon surely had in mind those eloquent specifications of Mr. Hay. He plans first, by a series of terraces, to raise the ground-level at the site of the memorial so that it will be forty-five feet higher than the general grade of the park. To secure this elevation, there will be a circular terrace eleven feet high and one thousand feet in diameter. On its outer edge will be planted four concentric rows of trees, leaving in the center a plateau seven hundred and fifty-five feet in diameter.

VIEW LOOKING UP THE MALL TO THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT AND THE CAPITOL FROM THE COLONNADE OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT

In the center of this plateau will rise an eminence supporting a terraced wall of masonry fourteen feet high, two hundred and fifty-six feet long, and one hundred and eighty-six feet wide. Crowning the terrace will stand the pure white marble memorial. Three steps eight feet high form a platform under the columns, two hundred and four feet long and one hundred and thirty-four feet wide.

The colonnade is to be one hundred and eighty-eight feet long and one hundred and eighteen feet wide, the marble columns being forty-four feet high and seven feet and five inches in diameter at the base. The total height of the structure above the terrace is ninety-nine feet.

Mr. Bacon's conception of the most appropriate memorial to Lincoln was that it should be composed of four features—a statue of Lincoln himself, a memorial of the Gettysburg speech, another of the second inaugural address, and finally a symbol of the Union which he saved. The statue of Lincoln will occupy the central memorial hall. Within this imposing chamber no other object except the heroic effigy of the Emancipator will be placed. At either side will be smaller halls—one containing the memorial of the second inaugural, the other that of the Gettysburg address. The speeches will be shown in bronze letters on a monumental tablet.

The symbol of the Union is found in a colonnade surrounding the walls within which the memorials are enclosed—a colonnade of thirty-six pillars, one for each State existing at the time of Lincoln's death. On the walls above the colonnade will be placed forty-eight festoons, one for each State of the present Union.

In brief, this is the simple, dignified, noble memorial that is planned for Lincoln. Mr. Bacon believed that the same splendid simplicity which lay at the bottom of the great President's character should also give dominating tone and quality to an appropriate memorial in his honor.